



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Arizona National Guard provides medical support in statewide disaster exercise

VALDEZ, Alaska — The 966th Area Medical Support Company from the Arizona National Guard, in conjunction with Valdez Emergency Management and National Guard units from other states, trained to provide emergency medical support in Valdez Saturday. The unit augmented the local hospital by setting up an alternate medical site at Valdez's Herman Hutchens Elementary School gymnasium and handling a mass casualty event.

As part of the overall remembrance of the 1964 "Good Friday" earthquake, the 966th AMSC participated in Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014. VG-AK14 is a regional, tactically focused exercise and will have multiple interagency field-training exercises that are focused on the response and recovery from a major earthquake and tsunami. VG-AK14 is an exercise conducted to ensure the state of Alaska and the nation are prepared and ready to respond to catastrophic events.

The scenario in Valdez revolved around an earthquake and subsequent tsunami that caused significant damage and injured a large number of residents to the point that the local hospital was overwhelmed and required additional resources to assist the injured.

"We are here to augment the hospital capabilities of Valdez," said 1st Sgt. Terry Thompson, Arizona National Guard, first sergeant of the 966th Area Medical Support Company.

The 966th is capable of deploying to a temporary location and receiving patients needing emergency care before sending those stabilized patients to higher medical care.

"The 966th is a medical unit that is ready to deploy in time of war or in a time of disaster and we work to provide medical support in a wide range of care to get them stable enough to be transported out to higher medical care," said Sgt. Bianca Lujan-Dart, Arizona National Guard, a medic with the 966th AMSC.

As part of the exercise, the 966th set up a four-bed trauma center in an elementary school gymnasium and accepted waves of role-players acting as patients who injured during the simulated disasters striking Valdez and who were unable to receive treatment at the overwhelmed local hospital.

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"There is communication between the Valdez Emergency Operations Center and we have a liaison at the hospital coordinating which patients will flow which way," said Thompson. "Some ambulances and the walking wounded will be directed this way. Our main effort is to handle the broken bones and minor injuries so the hospital can focus on the major trauma and if they get overwhelmed we can handle major trauma as well."

Vigilant Guard is being conducted March 25 through April 2 in the communities of Anchorage, Matanuska Valley, Valdez, Fairbanks, Cordova and Kodiak.

Prior to the Valdez exercise, the 966th spent time in some of the isolated area villages by conducting medical assistance visits.

"We conducted patient health care events in some of the small communities because one of the things we try to do is give back a little bit," said Thompson. "We are getting some great training from Valdez so we went out and did patient care and health referrals out there."

Although a great training opportunity for the 966th, the most important aspect of the event for the city is that Providence Valdez Hospital will use the exercise to evaluate the need for an alternate medical site as part of its evolving emergency response plan.

"We are helping Valdez make the determination if an alternate care site is something they will need or would consider bringing into their disaster plan if it were successful," said Thompson. "They want to know in a full-blown earthquake tsunami if an alternate care site would work or not and we are testing that out for them to see if it works or not."

"The people of Valdez see the work between the National Guard and the different agencies in the community as a great opportunity to work together and solve future disaster responses," said George Keeney, Valdez Fire Chief and Emergency Operations Director.

The Alaska National Guard also appreciates the assistance from other states in helping both the guard and Alaska's individual communities deliver an emergency response to the citizens of Alaska.

"The most important thing that has been brought to Valdez is the medical piece," said Capt. Eugene Cramer, Alaska National Guard, operations officer with Task Force Valdez, which was the command element of the National Guard emergency response mission to Valdez and Cordova. "The ability to handle a lot of casualties and deal with a lot of medical emergencies is vital to our emergency response mission."

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Photo cutlines follow

Photo cutlines:

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A trauma team with the 966th Area Support Medical Company, Arizona Army National Guard, conducts a final brief before a mass casualty training exercise held at the city of Valdez's Herman Hutchens Elementary School during Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard – Alaska 2014, March 29. This is a statewide exercise involving national, state and local agencies designed to test the response and coordination of different agencies in a disaster scenario modeled after the 1964 earthquake and subsequent tsunami that ravaged Alaska. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Capt. Brian Faltinson

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A nurse charts the treatment of a patient while two medics administer medical aid; all are members of the 966th Area Support Medical Company, Arizona Army National Guard, which conducted a mass casualty training exercise, held at the city of Valdez's Herman Hutchens Elementary School during Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard – Alaska 2014, March 29. This is a statewide exercise involving national, state and local agencies designed to test the response and coordination of different agencies in a disaster scenario modeled after the 1964 earthquake and subsequent tsunami that ravaged Alaska. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Capt. Brian Faltinson

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Two medical personnel with the 966th Area Support Medical Company, Arizona Army National Guard, receive a patient from a city of Valdez Emergency Medical Technician during a mass casualty training exercise held at the city's Herman Hutchens Elementary School during Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard – Alaska 2014, March 29. This is a statewide exercise involving national, state and local agencies designed to test the response and coordination of different agencies in a disaster scenario modeled after the 1964 earthquake and subsequent tsunami that ravaged Alaska. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Capt. Brian Faltinson